



ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER
HON. STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

August 21, 2020

Mr. Robert W. Keating
Director
Erie County Department of Budget and Management
95 Franklin Street, 16th Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Dear Budget Director Keating:

Yesterday afternoon, the County Executive announced funding for schools to assist with the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the listed recipients: the Aloma D. Johnson Charter School. Documentation provided by the County Executive's Office states this charter school, closed for over one year, will receive \$37,150.

A search on the New York State Department of Education (NYSED) website lists 20 Charter Schools in Erie County. The Aloma D. Johnson Charter School is not among the schools listed. Also on the NYSED website, the SEDREF – Core Information on SED lists the following information for the Aloma D. Johnson Charter School: "EDEN LEA Op Status Desc: Closed; EDEN School Op Status Desc: Closed."

In fact, various media reports state that the Aloma D. Johnson Charter School would close in June 2019:

"A charter school that struggled in recent years to attract enough students will close at the end of this school year in June. The board of trustees for the Aloma D. Johnson Charter School in Buffalo's Parkside neighborhood withdrew its application with the state Education Department to renew the school's charter."

Source: www.buffalonews.com, "Aloma D. Johnson Charter School will close, citing financial struggles," 1/26/19

"A local charter school will close its' doors at the end of this school year. Aloma D. Johnson Charter School's board of trustees has withdrawn its application for renewal of the School's charter, which means the school will close as of June 30, 2019."

Source: www.wgrz.com, "Local charter to school to close at the end of school year," 1/5/2019

I believe that these media reports are likely accurate. A call to the Aloma D. Johnson Charter School at their listed telephone number (716.856.4390) resulted in a message from Verizon Wireless that the call could not be completed as dialed. In addition, the school's publicly listed website is not functioning. We visited the school to confirm that it is no longer in operation. What we found instead is that there is a new charter school now operating there. The Buffalo Creek Academy is a fully accredited charter school opening August 31st. They have 5th and 6th grade students enrolled this year, with plans to eventually grow to a charter school for grades 5 through 12.

It is the view of our office that \$37,150 spent on a school that no longer exists would not be an effective or proper use of CARES Act funding, because it would not be used to protect or educate students.

However, this presents a great opportunity to provide funding for a new charter school that is servicing Buffalo children this school year. Let's take an honest mistake of potentially funding a closed charter school and turn it into something positive.

When staff from the Office of Erie County Comptroller visited the physical location of the now closed Aloma Johnson Charter School to confirm it no longer exists, they met administrators from the new charter school that is opening in a matter of days in the same building: Buffalo Creek Academy Charter School.

The stated focus of Buffalo Creek Academy is ELA, Mathematics, Science, Global Perspectives, Civic Engagement and Information/Communications Technology. As you know, because of the pandemic educators and parents are facing increased challenges in providing the proper instruction environment for their child/children. I would ask that you reach out to this new charter school, as I am certain that any additional funding to assist them with addressing issues relative to COVID-19 would be helpful.

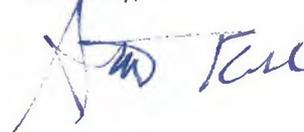
If CARES Act funding is being distributed to all public schools and charter schools across Erie County, I would ask you consider adding Buffalo Creek Academy to the list of schools receiving Coronavirus prevention funding. It is believed they are enrolling close to 50 students in Grades 5 and 6.

As such, it is the intention of the Comptroller to contest and not honor any request to remit \$37,150 to the Aloma D. Johnson Charter School without documentation that the school is open and operational.

In the alternative, please consider providing funding instead to an existing and open charter school: Buffalo Creek Academy. Dr. Christopher Manning, Ed.S. is Founder and CEO, Michael Broderick, MS.Ed. is Operations Director, and Antigone Peek, Ed.S. is Principal of the school. They can be reached at 716.217.2661.

Again, thank you for your consideration in providing a great opportunity for a newly opened charter school to receive assistance with COVID-19 funding intended for another charter school now closed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Kroll", written over a faint grid background.

Scott Kroll
Deputy Comptroller for Audit

cc: Mark Poloncarz, County Executive
Michael Siragusa, Esq., County Attorney
Dr. Christopher Manning, Ed.S.